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In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

DIFFERENT DAYS DIFFERENT WAYS

Among the older men reading these stories are farmers whose fields are now being ploughed with tractors which do the work of ten men.

The grandfathers of some of these farmers were pioneer settlers who came to this section in the late 1700's, and who ploughed their fields with an ox hitched to a crude plow-stock made from a crooked tree (or maybe a forked limb) as nearly the shape of today's plow-stock as was practicable to make by hand. They had no iron plows, but onto this crude plowstock they fastened a wooden mold-board and made it tight with a wedge. With this they ploughed their fields.

Today's plow lines are made of leather, but many of those pioneers used lines made of mulberry bark, for such cow-hides as they had were needed to make shoes for the family.

COTTON IN 1492

The first mention of the use of cotton in America (according to a story by John Schenck, Jr.) is found in the writings of Christopher Columbus. When Columbus landed on Watling Island in October 1492, the natives brought out to his ship—among other things—skeins of cotton thread. Obviously the Indians, long before Columbus' time, knew of the cultivation and use of the fleecy staple.

In an old book, I read that although the pioneers in this section planted flax as soon as practicable after they got here, they did not begin planting cotton for a crop until 1815.

Although these early settlers labored diligently from early morn till dewy eve, they knew very little about farming. They made their rows to run up and down hill, they planted cotton seed the same way they planted corn, covering it with the plow.

In a few days they went over the field again, knocked off the piled up soil with a board, flattening the top of the row and leaving it six inches across. The cotton plants were never thinned out, but were left to grow as thickly as they came up. The rich, unfertilized soil produced 200 to 300 pounds of seed cotton per acre.

Although Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin prior to 1800, our pioneer settlers did not have access to cotton gins. It is said that Samuel Hamrick invented the first local cotton gin "which had two wooden rollers, one on top of the other".

Without a gin, the only way to get the seed from the lint was the tedious task of doing it by hand. In this the entire family took part.

If there were slaves they were put at the task. I have read that a satisfactory day's work for a slave was enough cotton-seed separated from the lint to fill a man's shoe.

When the de-seeding task was completed, the cotton was washed, and then woven into cloth for the family's needs. If the hand loom were ready and set up a good weaver could weave perhaps two yards of cloth in a long day. Today, a weaver in our mills with electric-powered machinery can tend perhaps twenty-five looms, each of which is weaving approximately twenty to twenty-five yards of cloth in an eight-hour day.

The first cotton gins were quite crude affairs and were operated by horse (or mule) power, ginning perhaps a bale a day. An early gin was operated by Loss Batts on West Warren St., where B. B. Suttle now lives. About 1881, John Harrill and his son, Joe, operated a mule-powered cotton gin on North Washington St. Just above where B. H. Kendall lives.

FARMING IN 1860 AND IN 1950

Our farmers of ninety years ago

did not produce bounteous crops such as we have today. Note the figures below, copied from an 1860 Federal census report, and compare them with the 1950-crop figures which follow:

Cotton ginned	476 bales
Wheat	83,317 bu.
Oats	22,099 bu.
Tobacco	24,317 lbs.
Corn	378,985 bu.
Wine	246 gal.

The Federal Census report for 1950, taken a year ago, has not yet been published. The County Agent's office very kindly made up for me the following approximate estimates of crops in the county for 1949:

Wheat	131,430 bu.
Oats	321,980 bu.
Corn	913,500 bu.
Cotton (1949)	55,000 bales
Cotton (1950)	20,800 bales
Cotton (1948)	86,000 bales
Tobacco (1950)	55,000 lbs.

COTTON SEED

No mention is made of cotton seed in the 1860 census, because at that time the seeds were considered a nuisance. Less than a century ago farmers used cotton seed to fill up gullies, and threw it away as waste matter. Many of them continued this practice until the late 1890's. Today, cotton seed is used in a multitude of products, valued at considerably more than three hundred million dollars yearly.

In 1875, an agricultural paper gave a formula for making fertilizer, using equal parts of stable manure, cottonseed, a little more than half as much wood ashes, and some salt.

In a book, titled *My School Days*, written by Wade H. Harris, he tells how, as a lad in Cabarrus county in the 1870's, he worked at a cotton gin, built by

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the side of a creek. He writes:

"With a wooden shovel, I would dump the seed from the door of the gin-room into the water, whose swirling eddies would carry it down stream and away. The seed that was not given to the water was burned as the easiest way to get rid of it. The farmer did not want to be bothered with it, except perhaps three or four bushels of seed for next year's planting. . . . Ah, the golden dollars that were floating away!!

"Had Science come to the school house a few years sooner, how much more quickly would the South have rallied from the impoverishment of the Civil War."

Mr. Harris states further that the first cotton-seed-crushing mill in North Carolina was built by Charles F. Harris at Concord. A man from Georgia convinced him that ground-up cotton seed would be fine to feed cows to produce golden butter. Today, it is hard

for those of us who know the value of cotton seed meal as a food for stock, to realize that such a short time ago our grandfathers did not know its worth. This mill was crude and operation was not profitable.

It wasn't long, however, until seed crushing mills were operating throughout the East. As far back as the 18th Century the Moravians had been experimenting with cotton seed crushing to extract the valuable oil. By 1870 there were in the United States, 26 cotton-seed crushing plants.

During the Civil War several men from Shelby worked at seed crushing plants in Charlotte, crushing peanuts and cotton seed, and making products for the Confederate Army.

SOUTHERN COTTON OIL CO.

Records show there was an oil mill in Shelby in 1884. I do not know whether it crushed cotton seed or peanuts.

In 1899, J. J. McMurry, J. P. Dellinger, and others organized and operated a cotton-seed oil mill in Shelby. About 1900, they sold out to the Southern Cotton Oil Co., and J. Frank Jenkins was brought here to manage and superintend the operation of the mill.

More than fifty years ago our Southern planters quit throwing money (or cotton-seed, which is the same as money) into gullies and rivers, and waked up to the fact that cotton seed had a real cash value. For every 500-pound bale of lint cotton there are 800 pounds of seeds. Right now the price of seed is \$125.00 a ton. The oil mill here uses practically all the seed produced locally. They crush and extract the oil, which they send to another plant for refining and processing into cooking fats, salad oil, and spreads for bread.

DIXIE WHITE RECIPE OF THE WEEK

AROMATIC TOBACCO

I have heretofore written at length about the production and manufacture of tobacco in this county, during the early days. Ordinarily about 25 acres were planted, but in 1884 the farmers tried an experiment of 500 acres, and gathered a crop of 100,000 pounds, some of which was high grade and sold for \$1.50 a pound. In the late 1890's the local planters found cotton easier to produce and discontinued tobacco.

Last year, for the first time in more than fifty years, tobacco was planted on a small scale as an experimental crop. This, however, was Aromatic Turkish tobacco, from that heretofore grown. This was Aromatic Turkish Tobacco, and sold for 60c to 75c a pound. Whereas, that tobacco of sixty years ago sold for something like 15c a pound.

PRIMITIVE MARKETING

Before the railroads were built in this section, cotton and tobacco were marketed in Columbia and Charleston, S. C. Much of it was conveyed in a rather unusual way. I quote:

"A large tree was cut down and a portion of the trunk was cut off. The heart of the tree was burned or cut out, leaving just a thin layer of outside wood. A "head" was put on one end, and the hogshead filled with cotton or tobacco, packed in with a press, similar to the old style cider press. The other end was planked up, a cylinder put through the hogshead, and to this hogshead shafts were fastened. A horse or ox was hitched within the shafts; and this cargo was carried to market, over very rough roads, and across small

streams but remained quite dry."

HIGH GRADE WINE

For many years the lower section of the county had quite a number of very fine grape vineyards. Especially fine grapes were produced in the Grover locality. As shown above, 246 gallons of wine were produced in 1860.

After the Civil War, Tom Wells owned and operated the Cleveland Vineyard and Winery. This covered 100 acres just off South DeKalb Street. Mr. Pagenstacher (who also led the local band) was winemaker.

This Cleveland Winery sold its product to a firm in Wilmington, N. C. I am told that this Wilmington firm sent shipments of these wines out to sea, changed the labels on the bottles, brought them back to the States labelled "Imported French Wine" and sold them for a high price.

In 1865, the Federal government levied a tax of 50c a gallon on "spirits distilled from grapes."

There was a terrific battle between local prohibition forces and anti-prohibition forces from 1873 to 1878. The "Friends of Temperance" finally won, and legal liquor and wine were outlawed within two miles of the corporate limits of Shelby. I suppose this Winery was then forced out of business.

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